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## Non-kin ties as a source of support in Europe: understanding the role of cultural context

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### ABSTRACT

The ‘crowding-out’ and the ‘decline of the family’ hypotheses are the fundamental theoretical notions underlying the literature on cross-country differences in informal support. In this study, we expand upon these notions to develop and test the premise that cultural context shapes European’s views about an often overlooked source of support: non-kin. We carefully conceptualise cultural context as individualistic values and familialistic norms. Employing multilevel multinomial models and European Quality of Life Survey data from 27 countries, we confirm the importance of decomposing the broader notion of culture by demonstrating that contexts with both less pronounced individualistic values and less pronounced familialistic norms are conducive to non-kin rather than kin or professional help. Moreover, unlike prior work, which suggested the existence of a north/west-south/east divide in support patterns, our findings show nuanced cross-national differences in the importance of non-kin ties as a source of advice and help when looking for a job. We find some of the highest levels of non-kin reliance in countries in southern and eastern Europe, and in northern and western Europe more generally. We conclude by proposing ways in which future research can advance our understanding of the role of context in shaping support patterns.

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**KEYWORDS** Non-kin; support sources; culture; Europe; cross-country comparison

### 1. Introduction

Modernisation theory gave rise to two key hypotheses – ‘crowding-out’ and ‘the decline of the family’ – which have largely underpinned research on cross-country differences in informal support. In this study, we argue

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that these hypotheses have systematically glossed over the role of non-kin ties as a source of support and its link with cultural context. Moreover, unlike prior comparative work which has often treated cultural context as a black box (Nonnenmacher and Friedrichs 2013), we plea for a careful conceptualisation of culture, highlighting the importance of differentiating between familialistic norms and individualistic values. To conduct this research, we distinguish between three key sources of support – kin, non-kin and professionals – and focus on two types of support, namely advice and help when looking for a job.

To distinguish between support from members of the personal network and support received through institutional distributions and market exchanges, scholars have introduced the contrast between informal and formal support. Informal support is an unpaid help that is provided by family ties (that is consanguine and legal ties such as parents, spouse, children and siblings) and/or non-kin ties (ties that are neither biologically nor legally bond such as friends, neighbours, colleagues and acquaintances). Formal support encompasses institutional distributions and market exchanges and is provided by professionals or people who are trained and paid to assist others.

Support has many definitions applied in different fields of research ranging from sociology and anthropology, to psychology, to nursing and medicine. Embedded in the sociological enquiry, we understand support as the (potential) behavioural exchanges between network ties, which are intended as helpful and are also perceived as such (Dykstra 2016). Exchanges can take different forms, with some of the most important ones being instrumental and financial aid, emotional concerns and advice, and (physical) care (Wellman and Wortley 1990).

Support can also be subsumed under actual and potential, where actual support can be provided by one or multiple sources of support, whereas potential support refers to one's personal views about who is the optimal source of support (Messeri *et al.* 1993). Our research addresses European country differences in these views by probing into the role of cultural context in determining non-kin rather than kin or professionals as the optimal source of support.

Actual support provision and views on potential support differ across European countries. These country differences are embedded in two lines of enquiry, which have remained empirically largely separated. The first line relates to institutional context and follows the notion of the so-called crowding-out hypothesis. The crowding-out hypothesis posits that welfare advancement will crowd out informal social networks

and caring relations, which will in turn promote self-centeredness and a gradual decline of commitment to civic norms (Fukuyama 2000). Scholars in this field of enquiry have heavily focused on the distinction between formal and informal support. The second line of enquiry revolves around cultural context and suggests that rising individualism goes hand in hand with economic growth and welfare advancement (Hama-mura 2012), and ultimately results in the decline of the family. The decline of the family is suggested to exist in three domains: family structure (e.g. decline of marriage), behaviour (e.g. decline in support exchanges within the family) and culture (e.g. decline of family norms and values) (Popenoe 1993; Silverstein and Giarrusso 2011).

The distinction between formal, informal and family support stemming from these two theoretical approaches is largely mirrored in empirical findings on cross-country differences, which have glossed over the nature and mechanics of non-kin support. Broadly speaking, it has been shown that, compared with northern and western European elderly, southern and eastern European elderly are less likely to rely on formal, or on a combination of formal and informal care (Haber Kern and Szydlik 2010; Suanet *et al.* 2012). The scarcity of formal care, and support more generally, in the south and east of Europe has been indicative of the importance of informal support in the region. However, prior research merely focusing on informal support has revealed that people in the northern and western European countries, and not those in southern and eastern Europe, are more likely to rely on informal help (Kääriäinen and Lehtonen 2006; Hank and Stuck 2008). Family sociologists explain this phenomenon by demonstrating that in the north and west of Europe people more often exchange support within the nuclear family, but people in southern and eastern Europe more often engage in *intensive* care and support, largely so because of less generous public spending (Brandt 2013) tailored with legal (Saraceno and Keck 2010) and normative obligations to the family (Kalmijn and Saraceno 2008).

Only four comparative studies inform us about potential (Pichler and Wallace 2007; Gelissen *et al.* 2012) and actual non-kin support in Europe (Höllinger and Haller 1990; Gesthuizen *et al.* 2008). Their findings reveal a similar to informal support north/west-south/east divide. Embedded in the crowding-out hypothesis, these studies have also shown that cross-country differences in non-kin reliance are linked with country levels of welfare provision, where generous social spending is positively associated with potential support from non-kin (Gelissen *et al.* 2012) but is negatively associated with actual support provision

(Gesthuizen *et al.* 2008). This prior comparative work on non-kin ties reflects contemporary European differences in (potential) non-kin support in the light of welfare provision, but it fails to situate non-relatives in the larger support system. Consequently, questions such as how non-kin support compares to that of kin and professionals remain open.

In this contribution, we set out to answer this question and argue that, besides institutional context, cultural context provides a theoretical grounding for understanding the relative role of non-kin ties as a source of support. Prior work on the role of cultural context has been limited to the family decline hypothesis and has thus extensively focused on family norms (i.e. Kalmijn and Saraceno 2008; Haberkern and Szydlik 2010). Family norms, however, are only part of a broader system of individualism, with deep-rooted values of autonomy and independence which serve as a guiding principle in different domains of life (Schwartz 2007). In Section 2 and 3, we elaborate on the concept of cultural context and argue that values of autonomy and independence, along with norms of family obligations, shape people's views about the role of non-kin in their support system.

We conduct multilevel multinomial analysis employing European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) data from 27 countries. Prior studies operationalised support by a 'general support' measure (i.e. an index of support) or types of support that belong to the family domain (i.e. demanding care, and practical and financial support). However, the task-specific model postulates that kin, non-kin and professionals serve different functions (Litwak and Szelenyi 1969). Kin ties are often strong, and normatively and legally obliged to care and provide for each other, whereas, non-kin ties are defined by voluntary interaction and are best equipped to provide types of support that entail value similarity and access to resources.<sup>1</sup> Our analyses rest, therefore, on two types of non-kin pertinent support – advice and help when looking for a job – and we examine conditions under which people are more likely to turn to (a) non-kin rather than kin, and (b) non-kin rather than professionals.

## 2. Conceptualising cultural context

For all that is written in sociology about rising individualism and its power in explaining country differences, the discussion has remained largely

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<sup>1</sup>Although lacking the normative prescriptions for doing so, non-kin ties can also serve as a source of care and instrumental aid. Such support exchanges occur primarily amongst older people when the usual primary providers – their family members – are not available (Messeri *et al.* 1993).

qualitative. Most of the empirical work on the impact of cultural context on support patterns stems from the field of family sociology. In that field, however, individualism has been often equated with the concept of familism, as evinced by the long-lasting tradition of dividing Europe into ‘more individualistic’ northern and western European countries and ‘more familistic’ southern and eastern European countries (Reher 1998; Viazzo 2010). Whilst we concede that individualism and its opposite collectivism are linked with familism, we argue that they are different approaches to culture and understanding cultural context. Individualism and familism also differ in their relationship with institutional context.

According to the ‘The Big Three’ of cross-cultural studies – Hofstede, Schwartz and Inglehart – cultural context can be defined as a broader system of basic, deep-rooted *values* which serve as a guiding principle in life. Individualism is one dimension in this system and entails values of independence and autonomy. These values have the power to explain the diversity of practices across countries and underlie within-country, specific norms and attitudes in specific domains of social life, such as the family (Ester *et al.* 2006; Schwartz 2007). Hence, familism, when defined as family *norms*, can be seen as influenced by levels of individualism and as a more specific approach to culture with explanatory power limited to kin practices.<sup>2</sup> Unlike basic values which reflect what people truly believe is right to do, norms reflect shared expectations about what members of a society should or should not do (Schwartz 2012).

A key feature of cultural context as a system of values is that it can persist for centuries and changes only slowly (Hamamura 2012). This means that the potential impact of institutional arrangements such as social security provisions on individualism is likely to take a long time to materialise (Inglehart *et al.* 2017). Yet, it is also important to note that the existence and preservation of values of independence and autonomy are likely to depend upon the welfare state functioning as a safeguarding system. Inglehart (1997) empirically corroborates this notion by demonstrating that post-materialist values, including autonomy and independence, become more salient in societies whose existential security is ensured.

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<sup>2</sup>Note that familism is often associated with collectivism – that is the opposite of individualism. Yet, whereas familism tends to be conceptualised in the framework of the nuclear family and intergenerational relationships, collectivism extends to include the extended family and one’s larger community (Oyserman *et al.* 2002). As yet, three studies addressed empirically the link between familism and collectivism, albeit with inconclusive evidence. In short, Gaines *et al.* (1997) argued that familism is separate from collectivism, Lay *et al.* (1998) suggested that familism is an essential core of collectivism, and Rhee *et al.* (1996) advocated that familism is an important element of collectivism but distinct from a non-kin-focused type of collectivism.

Familialism, on the other hand, is tightly linked with institutional context. As argued by Dykstra (forthcoming) the generosity or restrictedness of public provisions variably releases or necessitates normative obligations. Release from family obligations is likely to occur in countries where public assistance is provided in kind rather than in cash, whereas necessity is more likely in contexts where social security is provided in cash rather than in kind. Moreover, the should-element carried by norms of family obligations is reinforced by legal obligations. Haberkern and Szydlik (2010) have, for example, argued that normative and legal obligations often coincide, making it difficult to disentangle their impact. Normative and legal obligations are sometimes conflated and examined in the form of typologies, such as Leitner's (2003) and Saraceno and Keck's (2010) typologies.

Diverging from prior practices of studying culture, we examine *both* individualistic values and norms of family obligations. In so doing, we are able to separate the effect of what people truly believe is right to do from the effect of what people feel they are expected to do given the current institutional environment in which they are embedded. For the sake of parsimony and considering the focus of this contribution, namely cultural context, we will, however, not develop and test hypotheses about the direct effect of welfare provision.

### 3. Links between cultural context and non-kin support

The defining features of individualistic and collectivistic cultures revolve around the notion of dependency between individuals. According to cross-cultural research, in more collectivistic cultures people are interdependent: they view the welfare of their larger community as central to the concept of the self (Triandis 1993; Gaines *et al.* 1997) and strive to maintain a sense of solidarity and harmony through fulfilment of their obligation to the group. This sense of solidarity and harmony is, furthermore, sustained through heightened sensitivity to the needs of community's members, empathy and reciprocity (Sorensen and Oyserman 2009). Since fulfilment of one's obligation to the group implies giving whereas reciprocity by definition infers that one gives with the intention to receive, people in more collectivistic countries can be expected to more readily provide but also demand from the circle of communal relationships. In more individualistic cultures, on the other hand, people are deemed independent: they value their autonomy and prioritise personal goals and needs over those of others (Oyserman *et al.* 2002;



Hofstede *et al.* 2010). Applying the contrasting notions of independence and interdependence to support patterns, we can expect that people in more individualistic societies may seek to achieve independence through receiving professional help, whereas in more collectivistic societies, people may rather turn to community members when in need. We, therefore, hypothesise that *with increasing country-level individualism people are less likely to view non-kin rather than professionals as the optimal source of support (Hypothesis 1).*

Compared with more collectivistic societies, where social relationships and group belonging are largely prearranged and relatively fixed over one's life time, in more individualistic societies social relationships are shown to be voluntary, carefully fostered and as result also greater in number and diversity (Oyserman *et al.* 2002; Hofstede *et al.* 2010). In other words, people in more individualistic societies are less restricted in expanding their social connections beyond the family – the first group in which an individual is integrated (Hofstede *et al.* 2010). Since a greater number of social contacts implies a greater access to various types of support, people in more individualistic countries may be able to leave behind and substitute (partly) the safety net which family ties provide. Following this rationale, we expect that *with increasing country-level individualism people are more likely to view non-kin rather than kin as the optimal source of support (Hypothesis 2).*

Since the strength of norms of family obligations signifies the extent to which people feel that support should be exchanged between the closest family ties – children and parents – we argue that *with decreasing strength of country-level norms of family obligations, people are more likely to view non-kin rather than kin as the optimal source of support (Hypothesis 3).* Here, it is important to note that the predictive strength of the concept of familialism lies in explaining whether a person is likely or not to select kin ties as the optimal source of support. It does not, therefore, provide clear clues as to whether people who are less likely to opt for kin will at the same time be more likely to opt for non-kin. We feel nevertheless safe in assuming that when strong feelings of family obligations prevail, people are less likely to opt for any other source of support than kin.

We do not expect that the impact of cultural context differs across the types of support under study. We do however expect that the extent to which kin, non-kin and professionals are viewed as the optimal source of support differs for advice and help when looking for a job. In brief, given that in our study advice pertains to personal and family matters, it is plausible to assume that advice is sought in the private domain or,

in other words, the probability to opt for non-kin ties (and, for that matter, for kin ties) is higher compared with the probability to opt for professionals. As regards help with looking for a job, it can be expected that both non-kin ties and professionals are more likely to serve as a source of support compared with kin ties. Prior research has shown that non-kin ties (Cappellari and Tatsiramos 2015) and professional services (Gregg and Wadsworth 1996) are most useful for finding jobs through the transmission of information about job opportunities.

#### 4. Methodological approach

To test the hypotheses, we use data from the most recently available (2011–2012) round of the EQLS. The EQLS is conducted every four years by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. Our sample consists of 27 countries in Europe, namely the European Union countries, except for Hungary, Greece and Cyprus, and Serbia and Iceland. We excluded Greece and Cyprus from the analyses due to lack of country-level data on individualism. We omitted Hungary because it is an outlier with extreme scores on individualism (80) and the observed probability to select relatives as a source of support (~90%).<sup>3</sup> The sample size per country varies between 1000 (Bulgaria and Slovakia) and 3055 (Germany). The age of the respondents ranges from 18 to 95 years for the analysis pertaining to advice, and 18–60 years old for the analysis pertaining to help with looking for a job. In the latter case, we restricted the age range to account for the fact that in some European countries (i.e. Austria, Bulgaria, Poland and Slovakia) the retirement age for women in 2012 was 60 years (European Commission 2012).

##### 4.1. Dependent variables

Our analysis rests on two dependent variables reflecting two types of support. They are based on the questions

From whom would you get support in each of the following situations: (1) if you needed advice about a serious personal or family matter; (2) if you

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<sup>3</sup>More elaborate investigation into the suspiciously high individualism score for Hungary reveals that the country was not part of the original set of countries but was added to the database later based on secondary sources (Hofstede 2001: 502), which Hofstede himself described in a personal conversation as raising more questions than providing answers. For the sake of a robustness check, we conducted the analyses with Hungary as well. They yield a rather similar size of the coefficients but with slightly different significant levels compared with the findings presented in this contribution (exact coefficients are available upon request).

needed help when looking for a job. For each situation, choose the most important source of support.

The answer categories were: ‘a member of your family/relative’ (kin); ‘a friend, neighbour or someone else who do not belong to your family or relatives’ (non-kin); ‘a service provider, institution or organisation’ (professionals); and ‘nobody’. Since we are interested in comparing individual choices for receiving help from non-kin rather than kin or professionals, we removed from our sample those who answered ‘nobody’ (2.9% of the observations for advice, and 18.9% of the observations for help when looking for a job). As the principle of Independence of Irrelevant Alternatives (Hedeker 2007) holds true in our multinomial models, omitting ‘nobody’ as an alternative outcome did not affect the odds among the remaining outcomes.

#### 4.2. Independent variables at the country-level

We measure country levels of individualism through Hofstede’s ‘Individualism versus Collectivism’ index. His conceptualisation of individualism is closely related to our theoretical framework. It stands for societies

in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him- or herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people’s lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. (Hofstede *et al.* 2010: 92)

Hofstede’s individualism index forms part of a multidimensional cultural model, which was originally developed in the early 1970s. At this time, the model was based on an extensive IBM database from 72 countries and validated against 40 cross-cultural studies from various disciplines (Hofstede and Bond 1984). Throughout the years, Hofstede’s model has received credit for a number of salient characteristics, including (1) the acknowledgment of the multidimensionality of culture and (2) its persistence over time,<sup>4</sup> (3) its application at the national level, and (4) universal coverage (Minkov and Hofstede 2011). Yet, not all scholars have been equally positive, with a key critique addressing the representativeness of the data. In response, further validation against World Value Survey

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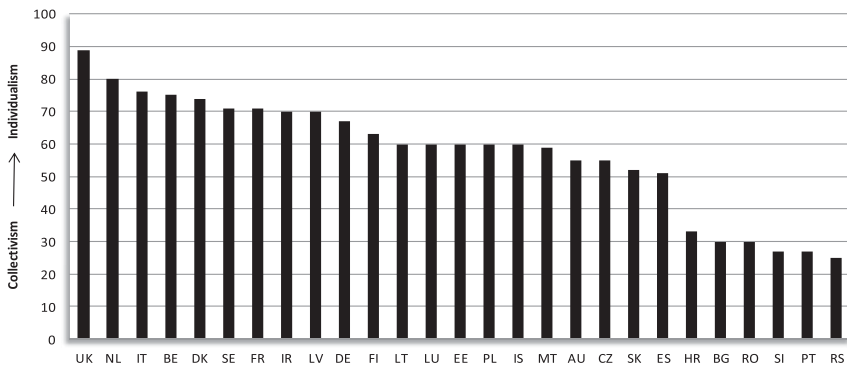
<sup>4</sup>Please note that although data could be deemed old, following Minkov and Hofstede (2011) we argue that cultures do evolve but move together in more or less the same cultural direction. Hence, the cultural gaps between countries remain the same. A confirmation of this proposition is provided by Inglehart (2008).

data was performed, providing evidence for the representativeness of the final database (Minkov and Hofstede 2013).

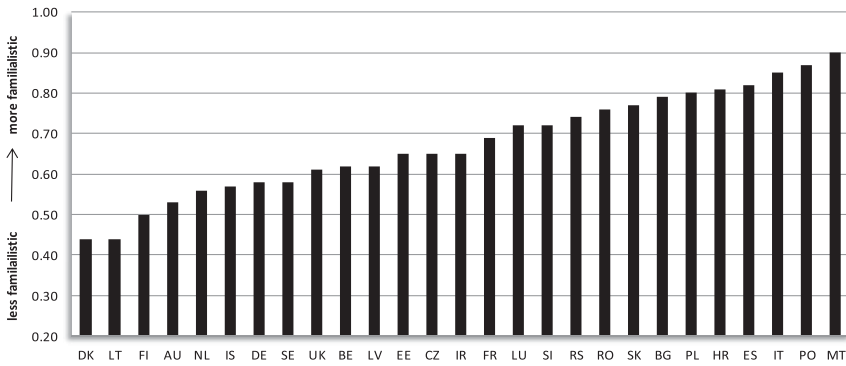
We obtained data on Hofstede's individualism index from Hofstede *et al.* (2010: 95–97). The index ranges from 0 to 100, where higher scores signify higher levels of individualism. Figure 1 displays the index of individualism per country, showing highest levels of individualism in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Italy. At the other extreme are Slovenia, Serbia and Portugal.

To our knowledge there are no ready-to-use macro-level measures of norms of family obligations. Therefore, we generated the measure by taking the arithmetic mean of individual-level scores. Data on norms of family obligations were obtained from the fourth (2008) wave of the European Value Survey and are based on the questions 'Which of these statements best describes your views about (a) parents' responsibilities to their children and (b) responsibilities of adult children towards their parents when their parents are in need of long-term care?'. The statements were respectively 'parents'/children's duty is to do their best for their children/parents even at the expense of their own well-being' and 'parents/children have a life of their own and should not be asked to sacrifice their own well-being for the sake of their children/parents'. Higher scores indicate higher levels of familialism. Figure 2 depicts the degree of familialism per country, showing that Denmark, Lithuania and Finland are least familialistic, whereas Malta, Portugal and Italy are most familialistic.

Finally, since countries with higher levels of modernisation and economic development are also known to have higher levels of individualism (Inglehart and Baker 2000; Hofstede *et al.* 2010) and more modern



**Figure 1.** Per country index of individualism. Source: Hofstede *et al.* (2010)



**Figure 2.** Per country levels of familialism. Source: European Value Survey, round 4 (2008)

family attitudes (Aassve *et al.* 2013), we control for GDP per capita. GDP per capita is an often used index of societal modernisation because of its wide availability and convergence with other indices of social development (i.e. infant mortality rate, level of education and urbanisation) (Hama-mura 2012: 5). We derived the data on GDP per capita for 2011 from the Eurostat database (Eurostat 2015).

#### 4.3. Control variables at the individual-level

Given our strong focus on examining the role of cultural context in shaping European's views regarding the optimal source of support, we treat individual-level characteristics merely as controls. Following theoretical insights into the mechanisms that govern the configuration of support systems at the individual level (Messeri *et al.* 1993) and prior research (e.g. Wenger 1990; Gelissen *et al.* 2012), we control for people's socio-economic and demographic background, living arrangements, frequency of contact and relationship closeness.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4.4. Method

The categorical nature of our dependent variables combined with the hierarchical structure of the data, where individuals (level-1) are nested in countries (level-2), require a multilevel multinomial model. We estimate three random-intercept models for each of the dependent variables. First, we estimate the model with level-1 controls only (Model 1). The 'level-1

<sup>5</sup>For detailed information about individual-level variables, please refer to Table A1 in the Appendix.

only' model serves as a base-line model and informs us about the variance at the country level.<sup>6</sup> The intra-class correlation or the percentage of the variance in the probability of selecting any of the categories relative to non-kin (reference category) that is due to country-level characteristics is also calculated based on the 'level-1 only' model. Subsequently, we estimate the combined model including both measures of cultural context (Model 2). As a final step, we add to the model GDP per capita (Model 3).<sup>7</sup> Since our dependent variables have 3 unordered categories, we have two sets of fixed and random coefficients. The fixed effects are presented as odds ratios, meaning that coefficients below 1 signify a negative relationship and coefficients above 1 signify a positive relationship. For the readers' ease, we present the final model's results in two separate tables, one reflecting the impact of context (Table 1) and the other reflecting the impact of individual-level characteristics (Table A2, to be found in the Appendix).

## 5. Results

### 5.1. European country differences in non-kin support

We turn to the observed probabilities of selecting kin, non-kin or professionals to gauge European country differences in the extent to which people view friends, neighbours and other non-relatives as the optimal source of support. Our data reveal fairly different patterns for advice and help when looking for a job. For advice, and in Europe as a whole, the observed probability to select non-kin as the optimal source of support (22%) is lower than that of kin (74%) but higher than the probability of selecting professionals (4%). This pattern persists at the country level as well, with some noticeable differences in the degree of reliance on non-kin ties. As can be seen in Figure 3, the highest probabilities for advice from non-relatives are observed in Austria, Germany, Denmark and Italy (around 30%). The lowest probabilities are found in Malta and Romania (around 11%).

For help with looking for a job, we find that in Europe as a whole the probability to view non-relatives as the optimal source of support (33%) is

<sup>6</sup>We treat the 'level-1 only' model rather than the 'empty' model as a base-line because in multinomial multilevel models the level-1 variance is fixed to the variance of a standard logistic distribution. As a result, unlike ordinary multilevel models, where the level-1 variance term is typically reduced as level-1 variables are included, in a multinomial multilevel model the random-effect variance becomes larger (Hedeker 2007).

<sup>7</sup>The correlation between individualism and familialism is  $-0.50$  ( $p < .01$ ) whereas the correlation between individualism and GDP per capita is  $0.47$  ( $p < .05$ ). Familialism and GDP per capita are not significantly correlated:  $r = -0.27$ .

**Table 1.** Results of multilevel multinomial analysis: predicted odds ratios for selecting respectively kin and professionals over non-kin as a source of help, macro-level estimates

	Advice			Help with looking for job		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Category 1: kin (reference category: non-kin)						
Fixed effects	Odds ratio (CI)	Odds ratio (CI)	Odds ratio (CI)	Odds ratio (CI)	Odds ratio (CI)	Odds ratio (CI)
Individualism (H2)		0.995 (0.986,1.004)	0.998 (0.988,1.007)		1.003 (0.993,1.012)	1.005 (0.996,1.015)
Familialism (H3)		2.484 (0.680,9.075)	2.558 (0.751,8.720)		<b>8.507**</b> <b>(2.281,31.735)</b>	<b>8.703**</b> <b>(2.434,31.115)</b>
GDP per capita (logged)			<b>0.674† (0.431,1.054)</b>			<b>0.674† (0.419,1.082)</b>
Intercept	<b>3.936***</b> <b>(3.248,4.770)</b>	<b>3.933***</b> <b>(3.256,4.749)</b>	<b>3.932***</b> <b>(3.274,4.723)</b>	<b>0.678**</b> <b>(0.540,0.851)</b>	<b>0.676***</b> <b>(0.549,0.834)</b>	<b>0.676***</b> <b>(0.550,0.830)</b>
Random effects						
Intercept	<b>0.158*** (0.397)</b>	<b>0.121***</b> <b>(0.346)</b>	<b>0.107***</b> <b>(0.327)</b>	<b>0.174***</b> <b>(0.417)</b>	<b>0.120*** (0.347)</b>	<b>0.111*** (0.336)</b>
ICC (in %)	4.57	—	—	5.02	—	—
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> (in %)	—	23.26	32.14	—	31.03	36.21
Category: professionals (reference category: non-kin)						
Fixed Effects	Odds ratio (CI)	Odds ratio (CI)	Odds ratio (CI)	Odds ratio (CI)	Odds ratio (CI)	Odds ratio (CI)
Individualism (H1)		<b>1.020* (1.003,1.038)</b>	<b>1.019* (1.001,1.037)</b>		<b>1.022** (1.006,1.039)</b>	<b>1.019* (1.001,1.036)</b>
Familialism		0.393 (0.037,4.128)	0.383 (0.037,3.970)		1.114 (0.115,10.776)	1.072 (0.114,10.111)
GDP per capita (logged)			1.336 (0.571,3.127)			1.686 (0.745,3.816)
Intercept	<b>0.167***</b> <b>(0.099,0.281)</b>	<b>0.167***</b> <b>(0.114,0.247)</b>	<b>0.167***</b> <b>(0.114,0.246)</b>	<b>0.669* (0.483,0.927)</b>	<b>0.668** (0.497,0.900)</b>	<b>0.668** (0.498,0.897)</b>

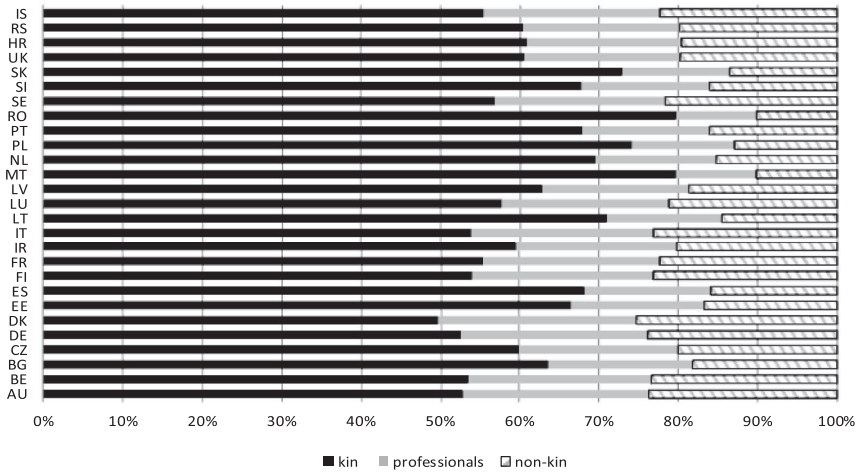
(Continued)

Table 1. Continued.

	Advice			Help with looking for job		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Random effects						
Intercept	<b>0.597***</b> <b>(0.773)</b>	<b>0.377***</b> <b>(0.614)</b>	<b>0.369***</b> <b>(0.608)</b>	<b>0.497***</b> <b>(0.706)</b>	<b>0.380***</b> <b>(0.617)</b>	<b>0.370***</b> <b>(0.608)</b>
ICC (in %)	15.36	–	–	13.12	–	–
Pseudo $R^2$ (in %)	–	36.90	38.19	–	23.54	25.55
Log-likelihood	60,585	60,491	60,496	36,156	36,162	36,164
Number of observations	31,797	31,797	31,797	18,774	18,774	18,774
Number of countries	27	27	27	27	27	27

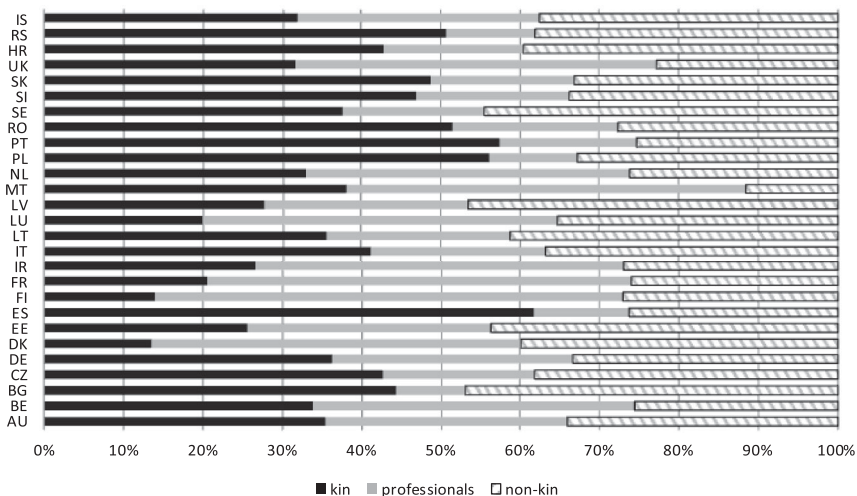
Note: \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , †  $p \leq .1$ ; numbers in parenthesis for the random effects represent standard deviation; CI: confidence interval; estimation method: restricted penalised quasi-likelihood approximation.





**Figure 3.** Per country observed probabilities for advice.

slightly lower than that of kin (39%) and slightly higher than that of professionals (28%). As can be seen in [Figure 4](#), however, we do not find a common pattern across European countries. Instead, we observe great differences between countries where the citizens of Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden and Iceland have a higher probability to turn to non-kin (between 44% and 47%) than to kin or professionals. The role of professionals seems to be most prominent in Finland, France, Malta, Denmark and Ireland whereas kin ties are most often selected as



**Figure 4.** Per country observed probabilities for help with looking for a job.

a primary source of help when looking for a job in Spain, Portugal, Poland, Serbia and Slovakia.

## 5.2. *The impact of cultural context*

As can be seen in Table 1, we find significant variance at the country level, justifying our comparative approach. For both types of support, the intra-class correlation coefficient (ICC) suggests that the variance which is due to country-level characteristics is higher for the probability of selecting non-kin over professionals (15.36% and 13.12%) than for the probability of selecting non-kin over kin (4.57% and 5.02%).

Regarding the relationship between cultural context and the perceived role of non-kin, kin and professionals as an optimal source of support, we find fairly similar patterns for advice and help when looking for a job. Regarding familialism, we find partial support for hypothesis 3: there seems to exist a statistically significant, positive relationship between decreasing strength of norms of family obligations and the likelihood that a person will turn to non-relatives rather than relatives when looking for a job, but not for advice.

For individualism, our results yield a statistically significant relationship with the probability to select non-kin over professionals, providing empirical support for hypothesis 1. Hence, with increasing levels of individualism people are less likely to view non-kin rather than professionals as the optimal source of advice and help when looking for a job. As to hypothesis 2, we find no empirical support: Our analyses yield no statistical association between individualism and the probability to select non-kin over kin.

Here, it is important to note that familialistic norms and individualistic values differ not only in their predictive power when it comes to selecting non-kin over kin or professionals, but also in their magnitude. As the country-level of familialism increases, people are 88.5% less likely to select non-relatives over relatives, whereas as the country-level of individualism increases, people are 1.8% less likely to select non-kin over professionals.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, turning to the coefficients of GDP per capita, we find that in countries with higher GDP people are more likely to turn to non-kin than to kin for both advice and help when looking for a job. The

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<sup>8</sup>The percentages are calculated based on the log-odds produced by the final Model (3). Exact calculations are available upon request.

probability that people will first turn to non-kin than to professionals seems, on the other hand, not to depend on country's GDP per capita. Including GDP in the final models does not change considerably the statistical and substantive importance of the remaining coefficients.

## 6. Conclusions and discussion

This study makes two important contributions to research on support. First, it enhances our knowledge on non-kin ties as a source of assistance in Europe. Non-kin support has often been overlooked in comparative work, arguably so because prior studies have been embedded in the crowding-out and the decline of the family hypotheses where the focus lies on formal, informal and family support. To our best knowledge, as yet only a few comparative studies have examined (potential) non-kin support (i.e. Höllinger and Haller 1990; Pichler and Wallace 2007; Gesthuizen *et al.* 2008; Gelissen *et al.* 2012) and they failed to situate it in the larger support system. We extend prior knowledge by demonstrating that when it comes to views about the optimal source of support, in Europe as a whole non-kin ties take a middle position. Put differently, non-relatives are more likely to be viewed as the optimal source of support compared with professionals, but kin ties remain the most likely source of support for both advice and help when looking for a job. This sequence of kin, non-kin and professional help suggests that despite the societal change which we observed in the past decades, informal caring relations have not lost their importance to professional help. This conclusion is in line with prior work, e.g. Dykstra and Fokkema (2011), Gelissen *et al.* (2012), Höllinger and Haller (1990) and Silverstein and Bengtson (1997), which largely refuted the decline of the family and the crowding-out hypotheses.

It is important to note, however, that this European pattern persists at the country level only for advice, whereas for help when looking for a job we find large differences across nations. This finding suggests that to better understand the role of non-relatives as a source of support in Europe, it is important to distinguish between different types of support. Since advice and help looking for a job are non-kin pertinent types of support, it can be argued that they have higher observed probabilities for non-kin reliance compared with other, kin pertinent types of support. Future research addressing different types of support (i.e. practical and financial help) can, therefore, further advance this field of enquiry.

As regards country differences, prior research focusing more broadly on informal support and social capital has suggested the existence of a north/west-south/east divide, with southern European countries being characterised by highest levels of family reliance and very few informal supports outside the family (Kääriäinen and Lehtonen 2006; Pichler and Wallace 2007). Our findings roughly re-create this picture of regional differences, whilst at the same time they provide a more nuanced view of *cross-national* differences in the importance of non-kin ties as a source of support. More specifically, for both advice and help when looking for a job, we find high probabilities to turn to non-kin ties in the north and west of Europe; yet, we do not find a common pattern in the south and east of Europe. On the contrary, in these latter regions we observe some of the lowest and some of the highest probabilities of selecting non-relatives as a source of support. These findings potentially suggest that commentators may need to move beyond the geographical grouping of European countries and acknowledge within-region, and, as suggested by Dykstra and Fokkema (2011), possibly also within-country differences in support patterns.

The second contribution of the study lies in carefully conceptualising and analysing cultural context. We argued that although rising individualism has often been seen as a potential determinant of support patterns, it has rarely been empirically studied. We, therefore, differentiated between individualistic *values* and the often employed concept of familialistic *norms*, and suggested that their effect on people's views about the optimal source of support may differ. Our findings substantiate this proposition by demonstrating that the impact of individualism and familism is different in magnitude and opposite in direction. More specifically, we find that with every point of increase in individualism, people are 1.8% less likely to select non-kin over professionals, whereas with every point of increase in familism, people are 88.5% less likely to select non-kin over kin. These findings lead to two important conclusions. First, norms seem to be of a greater importance when people select from the pool of informal social ties – kin and non-kin – whereas individualistic values seem to better predict one's choice for informal (non-kin) over formal (professional) help. This latter finding provides support for the premise that individualism operates through the notion of independence (Hypothesis 1).

Yet, we do not find support for the premise that individualism operates through the notion of voluntary interactions (Hypothesis 2). A possible explanation for this result is Triandis' (1993) observation that in more

individualistic countries people have larger and more diverse networks, but their ties are also often casual and entail little emotional involvement. Since support provision is determined not only by the number but also by the quality of social relationships (Silverstein *et al.* 1995), it is plausible to assume that individualism may better explain differences in social network size and composition than in sources of support.

Second, norms of family obligations seem to have a stronger impact than individualistic values, likely so because they are more closely linked with welfare arrangements. The institutional context is likely to influence country levels of familialistic norms, but not individualistic values, reinforcing norms' predictive power. Prior research has established clear connections between the kinds and generosity of public provisions and espoused normative obligations towards family members (Dykstra forthcoming). Legal obligations to provide support to family members often coincide with familialistic norms (Haberkern and Szydlik 2010). Aassve *et al.* (2013) show that individualism in the sense of having liberal family attitudes should not be equated with a retreat from family responsibilities. The authors argue that a longer history of self-determination and political autonomy brings greater opportunities to build civic values and social trust. In turn, the higher levels of social trust generate greater confidence in substituting the family's safety with support found in the wider community. Europeans are unrestricted in holding values of autonomy and independence, but are unlikely to behave upon them unless there is an institutional context allowing them to do so.

This study sheds new light on the importance of individualistic values and familialistic norms in shaping Europeans' choices for receiving help from non-kin rather than from kin or professionals, but certain issues remain to be illuminated. First, as cross-cultural research advances and offers new theoretical and methodological insights into the concept of individualism, research on support needs to devote efforts to further develop and test hypotheses on its role in explaining country differences. Other measures of familialistic culture, such as family values and attitudes, may also reveal new insights into support patterns. Up until now, family values, which are deep-rooted and only weakly influenced by welfare arrangements, have been primarily used in demographic research as they pertain to the importance of marriage and children (Van de Kaa 1994). Family attitudes, on the other hand, are about gender roles and therefore, have been primarily used in research on parenting and household division of labour (Poortman and van der Lippe 2009). Both

family values and attitudes are an important proxy of familialistic culture and may reveal new insights into the field of sources of support.

Future research on non-kin ties as a source of support may also benefit from establishing whether these cross-national differences hold true when considering actual rather than potential support. Although often neglected, distinguishing between anticipated and actual support is informative. When relying on questions about potential support, actual support can be under- or overestimated (Adams 1986). Actual support depends more strongly on the availability of sources of support than does anticipated support (Broese van Groenou and De Boer 2016), and thus might reveal different geographical patterns.

Following Gelissen *et al.* (2012) we also suggest that future research may benefit from new improved data which contain a greater number of countries and allow, therefore, to examine the impact of culture and welfare provisions simultaneously, as well as other potential covariates such as generalised trust, trust in institutions and labour market characteristics. All these characteristics are shown to be less favourable in countries in eastern and southern Europe than in countries in western and northern Europe (Ledeneva 1998; van Oorschot and Arts 2005; Nannestad 2008) and may, therefore, prove to be important in explaining country differences in European's views about the optimal source of support. To take the example of labour markets, it is only logical to assume that when professional services are provided, people will be more likely to use them even in countries with high levels of familialistic norms because professional services are particularly useful for the transmission of information about job opportunities (Gregg and Wadsworth 1996).

To understand the causal link between context and support patterns, as well as the link between cultural contexts and other potential covariates, it is necessary to employ longitudinal data. More dynamic statistical models, such as multilevel structural equation models (Rabe-Hesketh *et al.* 2004) will be suitable to examine and better understand the relationship between culture, other contextual explanations and social support. The interaction between social support and context is a complex phenomenon that merits a better understanding in comparative sociological research.

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## Appendix

**Table A1.** Descriptive statistics of model variables.

Variable	Observations	Mean/proportion	SD	Range
<i>Country-level characteristics</i>				
Individualism	27	57.41	17.94	0–100
Familialism	27	0.68	0.13	0–1
GDP per capita	27	24,555	11,363	8700–68,100
<i>Individual-level characteristics<sup>a</sup></i>				
Age	36,509	50.64	18.02	18–95 <sup>b</sup>
Male	36,509	0.57		0/1
Urban	36,444	0.52		0/1
Satisfaction with social life	36,021	7.20	2.18	1–10
Satisfaction with family life	36,061	7.96	2.11	1–10
Contact with relatives	35,637	9.62	8.15	0–25
Contact with non-kin	36,424	13.79	10.34	0–25
Living alone	36,509	0.23		0/1
Living with non-kin	36,200	0.01		0/1
Number of children	36,328	1.58	1.31	0–10
Married	36,308	0.60		0/1
Education	36,360	3.11	1.33	0–6

<sup>a</sup>Descriptive statistics at the individual level are combined for both datasets used for the analysis.

<sup>b</sup>The age range for the analysis pertaining to help when looking for a job is 18–60.

**Table A2.** Results of multilevel multinomial analysis: predicted odds ratios for selecting respectively kin and professionals over non-kin as a source of support, individual-level estimates.

Reference category: non-kin Fixed effects	Advice		Help when looking for a job	
	Kin Odds ratio (CI)	Professionals Odds ratio (CI)	Kin Odds ratio (CI)	Professionals Odds ratio (CI)
Male	0.909*** (0.858,0.962)	0.842* (0.743,0.955)	1.285*** (1.196,1.382)	1.258*** (1.165,1.358)
Age	1.015*** (1.013,1.017)	1.020*** (1.016,1.024)	0.991*** (0.988,0.995)	1.008*** (1.005,1.012)
Urban	0.888*** (0.838,0.941)	0.859* (0.756,0.977)	0.844*** (0.784,0.909)	0.935† (0.865,1.011)
Living alone	0.824*** (0.751,0.903)	0.886 (0.715,1.099)	0.726*** (0.638,0.827)	0.820** (0.721,0.934)
Living with non-kin	0.814† (0.651,1.019)	0.511† (0.246,1.058)	0.781† (0.599,1.017)	0.668** (0.495,0.902)
Contact with relatives	1.025*** (1.021,1.029)	0.990* (0.981,0.999)	1.016*** (1.012,1.021)	0.995* (0.990,1.000)
Contact with non-kin	0.991*** (0.988,0.994)	0.986*** (0.980,0.992)	0.995** (0.991,0.999)	0.996* (0.992,0.999)
Satisfaction with family life	1.153*** (1.134,1.172)	0.982 (0.949,1.017)	1.053*** (1.030,1.076)	1.041*** (1.018,1.065)
Satisfaction with social life	0.970*** (0.955,0.986)	0.895*** (0.865,0.926)	1.003 (0.983,1.024)	0.931*** (0.911,0.951)
Number of children	1.064*** (1.036,1.092)	1.092*** (1.039,1.149)	0.983 (0.947,1.020)	1.052** (1.013,1.092)
Married	1.399*** (1.292,1.514)	1.248* (1.030,1.513)	1.100 † (0.996,1.214)	0.797*** (0.717,0.886)
Education	0.887*** (0.867,0.907)	0.925** (0.882,0.971)	0.841*** (0.815,0.867)	0.939*** (0.909,0.969)

Notes: \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \* $p \leq .05$ , † $p \leq .1$ ; CI = confidence interval; Estimates stem from the final models, which include all country-level variables (individualism, familism and GDP) and individual-level controls.